

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SAIGON 00868 201158Z

41

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 DODE-00 PRS-01

PM-07 NSC-10 SPC-03 SS-20 RSC-01 CIAE-00 INR-10

NSAE-00 L-03 IO-14 NIC-01 ACDA-19 DRC-01 /105 W

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0944

C O N F I D E N T I A L S A I G O N 0 8 6 8

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI MOPS VS

SUBJECT: PRC/RVN CONFRONTATION IN THE PARACEL ISLANDS

PLEASE REPEAT TO OTHER ADDRESSEES AS DEPARTMENT MAY
DETERMINE NECESSARY

1. FOREIGN MINISTER BAC CALLED ME IN AT 4:15 JANUARY 20 TO DISCUSS
WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS THE VERY GRAVE SITUATION IN THE PARACELS. HE
TOLD ME THAT HE HAD JUST COME FROM THE PRESIDENT WHO HAD INSTRUCTED
HIM TO GET IN TOUCH WITH ME TO TELL ME AND THROUGH ME PRESIDENT
NIXON ABOUT THE SITUATION AND WHAT THE GVN PLANNED TO DO. FIRST,
BAC DESCRIBED THE PRESENT MILITARY SITUATION AS REPORTED SAIGON 863
AND HE GAVE ME A COPY OF THE COMMUNIQUE THE FOREIGN MINISTRY ISSUED
JANUARY 19 (SAIGON 0866). THE PRC HAD, HE SAID, RESORTED TO OVER-
WHELMING FORCE, INCLUDING AT LEAST THREE MIG'S, AND HAD FORCED THE
GVN NAVAL FORCE TO WITHDRAW LEAVING VIETNAMESE TROOPS STRANDED
ON ROBERT, MONEY AND PATTLE ISLANDS. THESE MEN (WHICH I AM
INFORMED NUMBER ABOUT 70) PROBABLY HAVE ALL BEEN KILLED, OR
TAKEN PRISONER.

2. BECAUSE OF THE OVERWHELMINGLY SUPERIOR FORCE AT THE COMMAND
OF THE CHINESE, IT DID NOT SEEM PRACTICAL TO ATTEMPT TO SOLVE THE
PROBLEM BY MILITARY MEANS. EVEN COUNTERATTACK BY AIR WAS NOT
FEASIBLE. THE PRESIDENT HAD THEREFORE INSTRUCTED HIM TO TAKE A
NUMBER OF DIPLOMATIC STEPS TO PROTECT GVN SOVEREIGNTY IN THE
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PAGE 02 SAIGON 00868 201158Z

PARACELS. BAC TOLD ME THAT IN THIS GRAVE SITUATION PRESIDENT THIEU

FELT THAT HE HAD TO CALL ON THE HELP OF THE U.S., THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM'S CLOSEST FRIEND AND ALLY. HE HOPED THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD LEND IT SUPPORT IN VARIOUS DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES IT PLANNED.

3. THE PRESIDENT HAD INSTRUCTED HIM, HE SAID, TO TAKE A SERIES OF DIPLOMATIC STEPS. FIRST, HE WAS INSTRUCTED TO INFORM THE SECURITY COUNCIL AND THE U.N. SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PRC ATTACK ON THE PARACELS. WHETHER A MEETING OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL WOULD BE REQUESTED HAD NOT YET BEEN DECIDED. SECOND, HE WAS TO FILE APPEAL WITH SEATO COUNCIL REGARDING THE PRC ACTION, THIRD, THE GVN WAS CONSIDERING TAKING THE DISPUTE TO THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE. BAC SAID HE WAS UNDECIDED ABOUT THIS AS HE FEARED THE PRC WOULD NOT ACCEPT THE JURISDICTION OF THE COURT, AND THEY WERE UNCERTAIN OF GETTING A FAVORABLE DECISION.

4. THE FOURTH STEP THAT HE HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO TAKE WAS TO NOTIFY THE SIGNATORIES OF THE FINAL ACT OF THE SITUATION. BAC SAID THAT THE CHINESE ATTACK WAS IMPORTANT FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT; WHICH PROVIDES THAT ALL COUNTRIES, NOT ONLY THE U.S., WILL RESPECT THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF VIET-NAM. THE SIGNATORIES OF THE FINAL ACT ARE SIMILARLY COMMITTED UNDER ARTICLE 4; AND OF COURSE THE PRC IS ONE OF THE SIGNATORIES.

5. FINALLY, BAC IS CALLING A MEETING OF THE SAIGON DIPLOMATIC CORPS MONDAY MORNING AT 10:00 FOR THE PURPOSE OF BRIEFING THEM ON THE SITUATION AND ASKING THE SUPPORT OF THEIR GOVERNMENTS.

6. I TOLD THE FOREIGN MINISTER I WOULD, OF COURSE, IMMEDIATELY REPORT HIS REMARKS TO THE SECRETARY AND WOULD BE BACK IN TOUCH WITH HIM AS SOON AS I HAD A RESPONSE FROM WASHINGTON. IN THE MEANTIME, I MIGHT OFFER, SOLELY AS MY PERSONAL REACTION, A COMMENT OR TWO ON THE POINTS HE HAD MADE. IF THE QUESTION WAS RAISED IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL WE WOULD BE AS HELPFUL AS POSSIBLE, GIVEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT OTHER ALLIES SUCH AS THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA, AND, I THOUGHT, THE PHILIPPINES ALSO HAD, FROM TIME TO TIME, ASSERTED CLAIMS TO THE PARACELS. WE WOULD, I THOUGHT, HAVE TO TAKE THIS INTO ACCOUNT.

7. WHETHER OR NOT THE RVN "APPEALED" TO THE SEATO COUNCIL WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 SAIGON 00868 201158Z

FOR THEM TO DETERMINE. HOWEVER, I UNDERSTOOD THAT HEARINGS WOULD BE HELD IN THE SENATE IN THE FORTHCOMING WEEKS ABOUT SEATO. PERHAPS IT WOULD SERVE EquALLY WELL THE PURPOSES OF THE GVN TO "INFORM" THE SEATO COUNCIL AS A MATTER OF RECORD WITHOUT MAKING A PUBLIC POINT OF HAVING DONE SO.

8. I SAID I THOUGHT THE GVN MIGHT WISH TO RECONSIDER THEIR DOUBTS ABOUT RAISING THE ISSUE WITH THE HAGUE COURT. IF THE PRC

REFUSED JURISDICTION, THE GVN STILL WOULD HAVE UNDERSCORED THEIR DESIRE FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT. IF NOT, SINCE THE GVN HAD NOW CONCLUDED THE MATTER COULD NOT BE SETTLED IN THEIR FAVOR BY MILITARY FORCE, THE RE COURSE TO SOME FORM TO INTERNATIONAL ARBITRAL MACHINERY COULD HARDLY BE TO THEIR DISADVANTAGE. I CONCLUDED WITH THE OBSERVATION THAT IT WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE USEFUL TO REMAIN IN INTIMATE AND CLOSE CONTACT.

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